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UNCLAS ROME 004158

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FROM U.S. MISSION IN ROME

AMEMBASSY TIRANA FOR AMBASSADOR JEFFREY, DCM ZATE AND USAID DIRECTOR BIRNHOLZ  
USAID/W FOR ADMINISTRATOR NATSIOS, D/A SCHIECK, AA/DCHA  
WINTER, AA/E&E HILL AND DDA MORSE, DCHA/D/FFP LANDIS  
STATE FOR P U/S GROSSMAN, IO A/S HOLMES, A/S PRM DEWEY, A/S  
EUR JONES, IO/EDA BEHREND  
USDA/FAS FOR U/S PENN AND CHAMBLISS  
USMISSION GENEVA FOR AMBASSADOR MOLEY AND USAID/KYLOH  
NSC FOR JDWORKEN

E.O. 12958: N/A  
TAGS: EAID AORG PREF EAGR AL EU WFP UN  
SUBJECT: Ambassador Tony P. Hall in Albania meets regional leaders and visits WFP sites.

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Summary  
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¶1. US Ambassador to the UN Agencies for Food and Agriculture, Tony Hall, visited Albania from August 22-26, 2003. He came at the invitation of Members of the Albanian Parliament and the European regional office of the World Food Program. He participated in the first "Balkan Gathering" with Albanian President Alfred Moisiu, Macedonian President Boris Trajkovski and other politicians from this troubled region. He then visited some of the hungry poor who benefit from projects run with food aid provided by the World Food Program. End summary.

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Background - First Balkan "Gathering" - "You can choose a friend but neighbors are given to you by God"  
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¶2. A group of Albanian parliamentarians from different political parties and on behalf of the Speaker of the Parliament of Albania, organized the first "Balkan Gathering" in Durres and Tirana on August 22-23. The Gathering served to bring together people and leaders from all the branches of the governments of the Balkans. Congressman Frank Wolf and Ambassador Hall were the two keynote speakers. Other participants included Albanian President Alfred Moisiu; Macedonian President Boris Trajkovski; Dragan Kalinic, Speaker of the Parliament of the Srbska Republic of Bosnia; Prime Minister of Kosovo, Barjam Rexhepi; and other politicians from this troubled region. Vice President of the German Bundestag Norbert Lammert attended, as did Norwegian Parliamentarian Lars Rise and ex-Austrian Government official Josef Hochtl.

¶3. A "gathering" of Albanians, Macedonians, Bosnians, Kosovars, Montenegrins, Serbs, and Croats - including current and future leaders in government, academia and business - would have been unthinkable a decade ago, at the height of the war in Bosnia. It provides hope for the region and the world that reconciliation and forgiveness have begun among people long divided by hatred. "I am excited by what I witnessed this past weekend, with former enemies calling one another brother and sister. I was encouraged by those who came together in the spirit of friendship," commented Ambassador Hall. President of Macedonia Trajkovski remarked: "We know now how to disagree (in a peaceful and diplomatic way) and have begun to build bridges rather than fences." A somber note was struck by Ms. Flora Brovina, poet and MP from Kosova: "the word forgiveness does not yet exist in the vocabulary of this region."

¶4. Bundestag Vice President Lammert summed up Europe's three desires for the Balkans: a) stability - "If the West doesn't stabilize the East, the East will destabilize the West;" b) prosperity - if not, then the specter of massive emigration; and c) identity - the Bosphorus defines the geographic limits of Europe.

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Looking at the social safety net  
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¶5. Ambassador Hall, together with US Congressman Frank Wolf, US Mission/Rome Special Assistant Max Finberg and Humanitarian Attaché Tim Lavelle, Embassy Tirana Emboff and USAID Deputy Director, WFP regional director for Europe,

Saeed Malik, and WFP country director for Albania, MushtaqE AND USAID DIRECTOR BIRNHOLZ  
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Qureshi, visited programs that provide food to vulnerable women in Tirana and La, food-for-work building roads in Milot and Postrive and a communal forestry project in Kallmet.

¶ 16. Under its protracted relief and recovery (PRRO) operation "Assistance to Vulnerable Groups in the Construction of Community Assets," WFP focuses on communal forestry and pasture management, social sector assistance and community asset building. Food-for-Work (FFW) is used for reconstruction of rural roads, desilting of irrigation channels, installation of electric lines and poles, and placement of water systems. Recently, the PRRO reached 2,415 beneficiaries under the communal forestry project, 1,790 women attended training and counseling sessions under the social sector component and another 2,180 laborers engaged in FFW infrastructure schemes. WFP's objective is to reach monthly 10,900 of the poorest Albanian households. Note: The U.S. has not contributed to the present PRRO, which is valued at U.S. \$6.6 million, and covers the period July 2002-December 2003. End note.

¶ 17. These projects are implemented by a variety of national and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs), including Refugee and Migrant Services of Albania, Albanian Association of Women Heads of Households and Islamic Relief Worldwide, as well as local governments through the Communal Forestry and Pasture Users' Association.

¶ 18. In one slum of Tirana, that rivaled the worst in the developed world, one woman noted that food assistance was the best currency because her husband could not use it to buy alcohol (unlike cash) and that WFP and its NGO partner monitoring were effective deterrents to selling food aid in the market.

¶ 19. During the visit to rural Albania, one woman on a community road building project told Ambassador Hall: "we're not just poor, we're very very poor," and one local official stated that "life is getting worse, not better."

The official provided this as the principal reason for deciding not to run for re-election in the next month's local elections. Note: Although Albania remains among Europe's poorest nations, these two sites are notable in remaining untouched by the economic growth and development experienced by other mainly urban parts of the country, and are among the worst examples of the pockets of serious poverty that remain in Albania and are not illustrative of overall conditions here. End note.

¶ 10. The US Government has donated approximately U.S. dollars (USD) 360 million to Albania on a bilateral basis since ¶ 1992. Additionally, the US has donated USD 175.6 million to WFP since 1997 to feed the hungry in the region. Of this, USD 22 million was specifically for Albania.

¶ 11. During a press conference on August 26 in Tirana, Ambassador Hall announced that the US Department of Agriculture (USDA), through the George McGovern-Robert Dole International Food for Education and Child Nutrition Program, was awarding a grant of up to USD 4.2 million to feed approximately 32,000 Albanian school children through the American NGO, Mercy-USA for Aid and Development. This grant is one of 21 USDA-managed programs to be approved worldwide with FY 2003 funding. Depending upon additional resources and performance, this funding could be approved for up to seven more years. Note: Although the official announcement had been made in Washington on August 15, the news had not reached Albania by the time of the press conference. End note. OF 03 ROME 004158

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Need for a continuing humanitarian focus  
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¶ 12. A number of social "tripwires" were discussed in meetings that Ambassador Hall and Embassy representatives

held with UN and NGO personnel, as follows:

- lack of access to justice for groups of people in need;
- lack or poor capacity in management and leadership skills of local government authorities;
- limited access to basic health services;
- difficulties accessing clean water;
- general poor state of (rural) roads;
- growing youth migration abroad;
- human trafficking;
- low employment among women;
- discrimination against marginalized and vulnerable groups of women; and
- negative impact of "blood feuds" in certain regions of the country.

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Comment  
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¶13. WFP's food assistance efforts are effectively reaching the chronic hungry poor and should continue beyond 2003. US Mission will dialogue with WFP Headquarters on expanding EU donor support. As one elderly man participating in a WFP food-for-work road building project told me, "America has been a close friend to Albania, not just economically, but also politically. Thank you for this project and for all of the other help." Our aid to those in need truly goes a long way and often, we do not have to wait long to see the fruits of our labor. Hall

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